

Cult of the Cog God



Legacy of Shadow for Shadow of the Demon Lord

New religions spring into existence all the time. A walk down Set's streets reveals the temples and churches of hundreds of faiths coalescing around ideas that range from the sensible to the bizarre, with all sorts of divine beings, monsters, philosophies, and mad beliefs at their cores. Add to these minor religions a host of small gods found throughout the lands of Rûl, and there are thousands, if not tens of thousands of gods, demigods, and quasi-divine beings who receive prayers from mortals searching for meaning and answers in places outside themselves.

Usually, the major religions pay little attention to these minor faiths as they tend to fade as quickly as they appear. But sometimes a religion's message is strong enough and offers enough proof of some divine being or concept, through miracles or other unexplained phenomena, that the beliefs of the few become a major spiritual force in the land.

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The Cult of the Cog God began in a fashion similar to these other minor faiths, taking shape from the efforts of a small body of clockworks who sought spiritual direction from something other than derision of living peoples, a being who would recognize and even sanctify their right to exist. *The Cult of the Cog God* reveals the secrets of Rûl's newest faith and gives players everything they need to create members of this faith for their *Shadow of the Demon Lord* games.

Menacing Machinations

Five years ago, the Matriarch of the New God issued a decree banning the worship of the so-called Cog God, declaring followers of this "false" god to be dangerous heretics. Her Swords of Astrid swept out from the Holy Kingdom and hunted down the acolytes of this new religion. The Matriarch's decree was clear: the followers of the Cog God could not be suffered to spread their twisted words or live.

Since few had ever before heard of the Cog God or any other being of a similar name, the majority of the Cult of the New God congregation leaders reacted with some surprise and no little resistance. Even as the witch hunters claimed bounties on the heretics' heads, factions within the Cult's leadership sought to delay the bloody pogroms. As soon as they began their efforts to declaim the decree, however, a private meeting with the Matriarch silenced them, and the Cult of the New God turned its full effort toward purging the Empire of this new and mysterious threat.

As months passed, the witch hunters descended on the clockworks, moving with all haste through the Empire's lands in search of their quarry. Few showed discretion, deciding that any clockwork, regardless of their religious affiliation or affirmation otherwise, was dangerous and should be purged. Let the New God sort the innocent from the damned!

Inquisitors, though, showed greater restraint, and through intense questioning of suspects and witnesses, gained a better sense of what the Matriarch had deemed a threat. They discovered, much to their surprise, that the priests of the Cog God were just as likely to be humans as they were clockworks. All of the renegade cult's adherents believed the Cog God revealed the secrets of creating these mechanical people to mankind as a way to improve on the body's design, in order to make a people superior to beings of flesh and blood in every conceivable way. Even more dangerous than these beliefs, they masked a far greater evil, one who roamed the world in physical form, performing the bloody and horrific work of transforming mortals into machines. And this diabolical force, as it moved from place to place, spread its ideas like an infection, causing people to tear themselves and their loved ones apart in sudden frenzied acts of mutilation.

The campaign to eradicate the Cog God menace lasted but a season. The orc uprising in Caecras and the subsequent chaos posed a far greater danger than some new minor faith built on dodgy ideas. The Cult of the New God recalled its soldiers to prepare the Holy Kingdom for what many believed would be an inevitable invasion from the orc armies. So, rather than eliminate the threat of the new faith, the Cult of the New God managed only to create a new enemy, one that became thoroughly committed to its extinction.

Oppression and Exploitation

What has come to be known as the Cult of the Cog God, and its hierarchy of the Assembled, traces its roots to Lij, the birthplace of the clockwork people. Despite the imperial ban against creating new clockworks, Lij saw the numbers of the mechanical people increasing each year, and many saw their new lives encased in bodies of cog and spring bent toward service. Clockworks would lift things, move things, guard things, clean and polish things, essentially performing all the menial and thankless labor anyone in the city could want or need. And when they broke down, whether their minds were still functioning or not, they would be cast aside, tossed into the dungheaps and bowels of the city to endure endless misery in pools of excrement, chemicals, and worse.

As exploited as the clockworks had come to be, they had plenty of sympathizers among the living peoples. Many have come to see clockworks as people and pushed to have them recognized as such. As part of the ban against their creation, the Empire's official stance toward them was vastly improved thanks to a compromise with their defenders, who argued that all existing clockworks be granted the status of people. Within the Empire's lands, clockworks could now become citizens and reap the rewards of being a recognized person.

The Call of the Cog God

Clockworks have no lands, no civilization to call their own. Instead, they adopt whatever culture in which they happen to find themselves. A few, born with some tattered shreds of memories, might seek out the lands they lived in when they were made of flesh and blood, but few clockworks wake with any memories of who they once were, thanks to the strange magic responsible for their creation. Clockworks, then, find themselves strangers in this world of flesh and blood, lacking a purpose other than that which is thrust upon them by their masters. It is the vacuum created by an absence of existential meaning that has encouraged clockworks to embrace any goal or



objective that might make their unnatural existence more tolerable. Their general openness to adopting causes has enabled the idea of the Cog God to take root and spread with alarming speed throughout their ranks.

About a decade ago, the first whispers of the Cog God made their rounds in the City of Wonder, spread by word of mouth by clockwork firebrands and their human allies. The essential message was simple: clockworks resulted from divine inspiration, and their existence serves a greater, supernatural purpose as designed by a mysterious deity who, for lack of a better name, had come to be known as the Cog God or, in some quarters, the Machine God.

A great many conflicting stories arose about this divine figure, many simply invented as ways to drum up interest in the new faith, but certain elements remained constant regardless of the source. The core belief is that the Cog God revealed the secrets of making clockworks to Arnos the Tinker after his family succumbed to the Shuddering Pox that ravaged the continent. From Arnos's work, it is believed, came the ultimate solution to the fragile mortality of existence. Life contained in weak bodies of flesh and blood would always be too fragile, subject to disease, trauma, and old age. To correct the flaws of organic life, humanity would create a new people that would be superior to the living in every way, perhaps even allowing them to outlast their creators, possibly for all time. Rather than be made as servants or thralls to mortals, the Cog God's faithful proclaim that clockworks were a superior improvement on the gods' work and represented the future of existence on Urth.

Considering what many clockworks had to endure from the moment they awakened, the thought that they were superior to their makers, and that their subjugation reflected their makers' fear and unwillingness to acknowledge their own obsolescence, had great appeal to the clockworks of Lij. It took no time for the new religion to spread through the city and throughout the Confederacy of the Nine Cities. The Sign of the Iron Cog began appearing everywhere, sometimes on the sides of buildings, and often affixed to the carapaces of the clockworks. Work stoppages and riots gripped portions of Lij and elsewhere as clockworks fought to put an end to their servitude.

Shadow of the Machine God

Even as the Cog God began attracting followers in the Nine Cities, a darker force moved across the land. In towns and villages scattered across the continent, on homesteads on the frontiers or trading posts on civilization's edges, sporadic, inexplicable violent acts had begun to spread. Travelers carried word of ordinary folks flensing the skin off their faces, sawing off limbs, taking pliers to their genitals, and performing similar acts of mutilation on family members and friends. One day, all was right and fine in these places—the next, they were abattoirs littered with the wreckage of broken lives. Survivors reported the attacks occurred suddenly and without provocation. Something abruptly changed in the attackers, and they began muttering about their flaws, their failings, or some aspect of their physical bodies they despised, and then the horror would begin.

At first, dark cults, faeries, even demonic possession were blamed for the atrocities. Investigations turned up no proof, and the actors who carried out the atrocities displayed all the signs of mental fevers and insanity of the worst kind. As more and more attacks shook the Empire's outlying regions, people began to whisper about the Machine God and how he was remaking the world in his image, one person at a time. (*Heart of the Machine God* includes far more information about this menacing figure and its origins.)

Two Aspects, One God

The Cog God and the Machine God pursue very different objectives. The followers of the Cog God believe they stand to inherit the Urth and are the heirs apparent to become an entirely new people. Whereas those who buckle beneath the Machine God's influence see self-inflicted torment as a spiritual exercise, one that frees them from the flaws of the flesh, enabling them and their loved ones to move closer to perfection. One works to uplift a people, while the other goads people into horrific acts of violence.

Whether there exists a connection between the two entities, the Matriarch of the New God certainly believed this was the case, and thus the crusade mounted against the heretics was largely focused on stopping activities related to the Machine God. Of course, putting a stop to the Cog God also served the Cult of the New God's interests since each clockwork made removes a soul from the wheel of life and traps that soul in the mortal world, which is one of the acts the New God came into being to oppose.

The contrast between the spontaneous conversions triggered by the Machine God and the organized

efforts of the Cog God's priests suggests whatever force lurks behind these developments might have competing objectives. Congregations dedicated to the Cog God unite behind improving the lots of all clockworks, while the Machine God spreads disease, wreaking havoc on a community for a day or two before the chaos abates. That the followers of the Cog God reject any association with these tragic happenings either strengthens the suggestion of a sinister agency operating independently from the new faith, or it is just a denial to maintain the mask that hides their diabolical aims.

While either proposition could be true, it's more likely that the more violent aspects of the religion's development reflect the entity's struggle to maintain its independence and nature as the influence and power of its believers grow. As more and more beings come to worship the Cog God, the more the power of their beliefs compel it to conform to and become something other than, and likely anathema to, what it sees as its original identity.

For now, the Matriarch and her attendant priests have far larger concerns, as the orc king Drudge has declared himself the new emperor, and set his eyes on the conquest and destruction of the Holy Kingdom. War looms on the horizon. Until some semblance of order can be restored, there is no one and nothing to stop the Cog God's cult or its sinister shadow from spreading across the continent.

Faith of the Clockwork

As a religion created by the clockworks, the Cog God's body of followers largely consists of these mechanical peoples. Clockworks of all backgrounds have found themselves drawn to this faith, and each passing year sees their numbers growing, though the mechanical peoples do follow a variety of religions, including the New God, the Old Faith, and others as well.

While many clockworks become true believers, the religion has appeal as a political entity useful for securing more rights for clockworks, and thus even skeptical individuals might join the faithful just to be a part of the movement without necessarily feeling any particular devotion to or belief in the deity.

Unexpectedly, the Cog God has also made converts of humans, especially in Lij. These people have embraced the idea that clockworks are the superior people and that one day they will replace all other sentient beings. These followers aid their fellows in the creation of clockworks, making converts of other humans, and fight on their behalf. Many hope to become clockworks themselves, and a rare few actually have.

Divine Workshops

Devotees of the Cog God gather in places of work, typically workshops used to produce clockworks that have since been seized by clockworks and their human sympathizers. They mark these places with the Iron Cog, which they hang above the doors, and carve the façades with strange geometric shapes whose meaning is known only to the high priests of the faith. After a few temples were razed to the ground by New God witch hunters and inquisitors, the Cog God's priesthood has recruited and trained their own templars to thwart any further mischief.

Given the cult's infancy, the religion has few holy sites outside their temples in Lij and a few other city-states. However, certain places throughout Rûl affect clockworks, causing them to behave in unusual ways. The Great Bell Tower in Edes, for example, attracts clockworks from all over, and when they stand before the structure, they stand perfectly still as if in a trance.

Many cultists recognize the stilled remains of clockworks, some destroyed or others who have wound down and refuse to awaken, as shrines of a sort. Liberated clockworks sometimes travel to these rusting heaps and offer bits of wire, cogs, and springs to honor their memory and sacrifice. In the center of Market Square in Lij stands a giant clockwork known as Titan. In protest for the treatment of his fellow clockworks, he had his key broken off at the base and stood there in the square until his mechanisms ran down. He has remained at this spot for thirty years, and clockworks from all over the city come to him and offer up prayers to the Cog God in his name.



Holy Ground of the Cog God

The Cog God seeks to remake the world into its image and ensure all things exist to carry out a particular task in its orderly conception of the world. Add one to any roll of an odd number made for a creature in the area of the Cog God's holy ground.



Maker's Day

The Cult of the Cog God recognizes just a few days as being holy. Maker's Day marks the anniversary of the Tinker's death, and the faithful mark the day by allowing their mechanisms to wind down and pass the full 24 hours in an inactive state. Other days commemorate events important to the faith, such as the destruction of martyrs, the founding of a temple, and the Empire's recognition of their kind as people.

Enemies of the New God

The appearance of a new religion is hardly cause for worry for most other religious institutions, but the Cult of the New God, for reasons explained already, regards this particular new faith as an affront and maintains its hostility toward it, even if the Matriarch has suspended, for now, the crusade against them. The witch hunters achieved much success crusading inside imperial lands, but have made scant progress within the Confederacy's bounds, largely as a result of the Cog God's followers being confined to the city-states, where they can expect to receive protection from the cities' autarchs.

Even though the Cult of the New God has turned its attention away from the Cog God's followers for now, its small congregations have not relaxed their vigilance, remaining ever watchful for spies in their midst. In Azūl, some followers of the Cog God, after suffering losses at the hands of witch hunters, have sought retribution, going against the wishes of their priests. They burned a shrine of the New God and beat its keeper to death, an addled youth of just thirteen years.

Priests of the Cog God

The Cog God counts clockworks and a rare few humans among its devoted priests; the religion has had little luck or interest in converting other peoples. All the priests heard their god's call, who has compelled them to go forth, evangelize, and seek out other priests for instruction. The call comes in the form of weird patterns detected in the ticks, squeaks, and other sounds emanating from their internal mechanisms. Would-be human priests experience a different calling, which often involves recalling an existence as a clockwork, perhaps from a previous life.

Acolytes undergo a brief period of training, but with little focus on dogma or indoctrination. Instead, they spend their time learning how to build clockwork bodies and the prayers and rituals that eventually lead to fetching souls from the Underworld to inhabit and enliven the mechanical bodies. Once they have a working knowledge of magic and engineering, the acolytes become full-fledged priests, called the Assembled, and move to serve in one of the cult's temples where they aid in constructing new clockworks and see to the congregation's needs.

Priests of the Cog God use the Iron Cog as the symbol of their faith and clockworks affix it to their bodies, usually on their chest plates, but sometimes on their heads and faces. Humans typically wear Iron Cog medallions, although some fervent believers have tattooed it upon their foreheads. Since clockworks do not need to wear clothing, the faith has no particular vestment, though many clockwork priests wear sashes and long scarves of metallic-colored cloth stitched with geometric patterns.



Level 1 Priest of the Cog God

Attributes Choose two attributes and increase both by 1.

Characteristics Health +4, Power +1

Languages and Professions You add engineering and theology to your list of professions.

Magic You discover the Divination, Necromancy, or Technomancy tradition. Then choose one of the following options.

- You discover the other two traditions.
- You discover one of the other traditions and learn one spell.
- You learn two spells.

Surging Clockwork You can use an action to heal damage equal to your healing rate and make an attack with a weapon. Once you use this talent, you must complete a rest before you can use it again.

Rouse the Sleeper You can use an action, or a triggered action on your turn, to choose one clockwork within short range that is in object form. If the target is not dead or incapacitated, it immediately becomes a creature. The target must still have its key for it to become a creature.

Level 2 Priest of the Cog God

Characteristics Health +4

Magic Choose one of the following options:

- You discover two traditions from Divination, Necromancy, or Technomancy.
- You discover the Divination, Necromancy, or Technomancy tradition and learn one spell.
- You learn two spells.

Invoke the Machine Mind When a creature within short range would make an attack roll or a challenge roll, you can use a triggered action to grant 1 boon on the roll. If the roll results in a success, the triggering creature can move 2 yards if its Speed is at least 2. This movement does not trigger free attacks.

Level 5 Expert Priest of the Cog God

Characteristics Health +4, Power +1

Magic You learn one spell.

Clockwork Strike When you use Invoke the Machine Mind to grant 1 boon on an attack roll, the triggering attack deals 1d6 extra damage. In addition, if the granted boon came up as a 6, you regain the use of a triggered action.

Level 8 Master Priest of the Cog God

Characteristics Health +4

Magic You learn one spell.

Clockwork Escalation When you use Invoke the Machine Mind, roll a d6. If you roll a 5 or 6, one creature you choose within short range gains an action and can use it at any point before the end of the round. Once the creature uses this action, roll a d6. On an odd number, the target becomes stunned for 1 round.

Greater Surge You can use Surging Clockwork twice.

Complication: Machine God's Spawn

The passing of the Crawling Caravan, which some claim holds the Machine God's heart, awakened in your mind the flaws of your physical form and goaded you to make appalling modifications to your body. The Remaker has no formal priests and no real cult; instead, its "followers" are individual

people who have fallen under its influence and gone mad as a result.

Your Insanity total increases to a number equal to your Will score minus 1 and you gain the following traits. You can reduce your Insanity total through normal means.

Mutilated You tore your flesh and cut away body parts to help you realize your new form. In social situations, you make attack rolls to intimidate with 2 boons and attack rolls to do anything else in a social situation with 3 banes.

Pain Tolerance When you would become impaired, make a Will challenge roll. On a success, you remove the impaired affliction from yourself.

Remade Characters

Humans, and rarely other ancestries, who come under the sway of the Cog God sometimes experience an overwhelming urge to become clockworks themselves. Typically, the impulse manifests as personality quirks, wherein the individual's behavior and movements match that of clockworks. They might speak in weird, toneless voices, move in a stilted manner, and forgo food and water until absolutely necessary. On occasion, these individuals go to even greater lengths and enlist the aid of a high priest to transmigrate their souls into a clockwork body and thus become "Remade."

Only ancestries of flesh and blood can become remade. If you want to play a Remade starting character, use the normal rules for creating a clockwork. If, however, you make the decision during the campaign to become one, you can apply the following alterations with your GM's permission, provided you are able to find access to a place and the expertise to enable such a transformation to occur, primarily the aid of someone who knows or has access to the *liberate soul* spell, described below, and the *bind soul to machine* spell, originally presented in *Ghosts in Machines*.

LIBERATE SOUL

NECROMANCY UTILITY 5

Requirement You must have an ornate vessel such as a box or urn worth at least 1 gc and an ornate silver knife worth 1 gc.

Target One restrained or unconscious living creature that has a soul.

Upon casting this spell, you must concentrate for 1 hour, during which time you cut the threads that bind the soul to the target's body. When you finish, the soul slips from the body and moves into the prepared vessel where it remains until the vessel is destroyed, at which point the soul becomes a **manes** if it has 0 Corruption or a **lemure** if it has any Corruption.

Remade Traits

Attributes You retain your Intellect and Will scores, but reduce your Strength by 1 and your Agility by 2.

Defense Your base Defense becomes 13.

Size Your Size becomes 1.

Speed Your Speed becomes 8.

Insanity Your Insanity increases by 1d6.

Languages and Professions You retain all languages and professions.

Ancestry Traits Lose all traits gained from your original ancestry and gain Immune, Key, Mechanical Body, Wind the Clock, and Repair Damage traits from the clockwork ancestry. If your group level is 4 or higher and you gained a talent from your original ancestry, replace that talent with Grind the Gears. In addition, reduce your Health by the amount gained from your level 4 feature from your ancestry and increase it by 5.

Magic You retain all traditions discovered and all spells learned.

Talents You retain all talents gained from your paths.